DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 324 583 CG 022 839

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TITLE Japanese Sex Differences in Preferred & Observed Divisions of Labor in the Home.
PUB DATE 12 Nov 90
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council on Family Relations (52nd, Seattle, WA, November 9-14, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; Cultural Context; Family Attitudes; *Family Life; Foreign Countries; *Home Management; Marital Satisfaction; Non Western Civilization; *Sex Differences; *Sex Role; Sex Stereotypes; *Spouses
IDENTIFIERS *Divison of Labor (Household); *Japan

ABSTRACT

This research describes sex roles and divisions of labor observed in families of origin by contemporary Japanese (n=1,000) and contemporary preferences for division or sharing of family tasks. It then compares these preferences to determine whether significant differences exist between men and women in contemporary Japan. For their present and future family life, these Japanese subjects preferred a division of labor in which wives take primary responsibility for housework and husbands take primary responsibility for home maintenance, "breadwinning," and decision making. While the Japanese women tended to think wives should be more responsible than husbands for maintenance of health and management of finances, Japanese men appeared to desire an equal share of these responsibilities. Both Japanese men and women indicated a preference for equal sharing of responsibilities involving education, discipline, recreation, birth control, and communication with relatives. These Japanese men and women differed significantly in their preferences regarding division or sharing of five traditional family tasks. The women wanted more equality or sharing of tasks related to housework, education, "breadwinning," and decision making. The men wanted more equality or sharing of tasks related to maintenance of health. These findings were construed as issues warranting communication and negotiation in family relationships in contemporary Japan. References are included. (Author/TE)

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Japanese Sex Differences in Preferred & Observed Divisions of Labor in the Home*

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*Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council on Family Relations, Seattle, November 12, 1990.

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Abstract

This research: (1) describes sex roles and divisions of labor observed in families of origin by contemporary Japanese, (2) describes contemporary preferences for division or sharing of family tasks, and (3) compares those preferences to determine whether significant differences exist between men and women in contemporary Japan.

For their present and future family life, Japanese subjects indicated a preference for a division of labor in which wives take primary responsibility for housework and husbands take primary responsibility for home maintenance, "breadwinning," and decision making. While Japanese women tended to think wives should be more responsible than husbands for maintenance of health and management of finances, Japanese men appeared to desire an equal sharing of these responsibilites. Both Japanese men and women indicated a preference for equal sharing of responsibilities involving education, discipline, recreation, birth control, and communication with relatives.

Japanese men and women differed significantly in their preferences regarding division or sharing of five traditional family tasks. Japanese women wanted more equality or sharing of tasks related to housework, education, "breadwinning," and decision making. Japanese men wanted more equality or sharing of tasks related to maintenance of health. These were construed as issues warranting communication and negotiation in family relationships in contemporary Japan.

Japanese Sex Differences in Preferred & Observed Divisions of Labor in the Home

According to Japanese traditions, the lives and work of Japanese men and women were different, separate, and segregated. Family roles and labors were traditionally divided by sex rather than shared equally. However, recent changes in the life cycles of Japanese women and families may result in changing attitudes, ideals and preferences for division of labor in contemporary Japanese families. To the extent that such changes result in differences between men and women in their preferences and expectations, conflicts between the sexes may increase. The purposes of this study are to (1) describe the "traditional" division of labors observed or recalled in families of origin by contemporary Japanese, (2) describe family division of labor ideals and preferences of contemporary Japanese men and women, and (3) compare those ideals and preferences to determine whether significant differences exist between men and women in contemporary Japan.

According to traditional Japanese ideals, men are responsible for work outside the home (i.e., "breadwinning") and women are responsible for management of the home (i.e., "homemaking") and budget.

The urban "salaryman" husband commonly leaves home (for work) early, and returns home late. Many husbands are absent most of the week. Salarymen socialize in bars or restaurants

after work or on the golf course on weekends. Given such lifestyles, there is little overlap between the worlds of men (and work) and women (and home). That many Japanese prefer a separation of labors and roles is implied by the saying that a good husband is healthy and absent (Imamura, 1987). On the other hand, there is also evidence that contemporary Japanese men and women want to share interests and activities with their spouses (Engel, 1990). It may be that shared activities and roles are becoming more acceptable in contemporary Japan.

Japanese women are often viewed as paragons of housewifery, homemaking and domestic arts. Traditionally, Japanese girls were educated to be "good wives and wise mothers." According to Baron Kikuchi (1909, cited by Smith, 1983), a former Minister of Education and President of both Tokyo and Kyoto Universities, a "good wife and wise mother" should be prepared "to help (her working man), for the common interests of the house, and as her share of duty to the state, by sympathy and encouragement, by relieving him of anxieties at home, managing household affairs, looking after the household economy, and ... tending the old people and bringing up the children in a fit and proper manner." Traditional ideals are still taught in Japan, in social studies text books (Lewis, et. al., 1977), and in compulsory home economics courses (Keiko, 1982). It's not surprising then that Sylvia Porter (1981), a popular American press columnist, recently described the Japanese housewife as "the world's best financial manager."

Although many women in traditional Japan did work outside the home, in agriculture and textile industries, cultural norms encouraged women to be homemakers. Nevertheless, attitudes towards employment of women outside the home may be changing (Engel, 1988a, 1988b). Research carried out in 1982 by the Japanese government (Prime Minister's Office) found that 71 percent of women still believed that "the husband should work outside and the wife should take care of the family and home" (Imai, et. al., 1985). On the other hand, Kieko (1982) reported that the majority of one sample of female college graduates desired to work prior to birth of their first child and then again after the child is "older." Thus at least for some Japanese women, the absence of (presumably dependent) children is a factor that qualifies sex role and division of labor ideals. Additional research is needed that specifies more clearly the context and conditions in which women live and work, including presence of dependent children or elders, and attitudes of husband.

The Japanese family life cycle has changed dramatically since World War II (Kumagai, 1984), with implications for division of labors and roles in Japanese families. While nearly all Japanese women marry, the typical Japanese woman marries later (when she is in her mid or late 20's) and has more time to develop interests outside the family, including a career, than did her predecessors. On the average, Japanese women have their first child one year after marriage and their last child two

years later. Given relatively short child bearing/rearing periods, contemporary Japanese women have more time for interests and endeavors outside the home. One might expect corresponding changes in behaviors and values related to women's roles in and outside the home.

The purposes of this research are to (1) describe the "traditional" division of labors observed in families of origin by contemporary Japanese, (2) describe family division of labor ideals and preferences of contemporary Japanese men and women, and (3) compare those ideals and preferences to determine whether significant differences exist between men and women in contemporary Japan.

Method

As part of a larger study of Japanese work and family values, a questionnaire was designed to ascertain (1) observations/memories of division/sharing of labors in one's family of origin and (2) ideals or preferences for division/sharing of labors in one's present or future family. Eleven family tasks or responsibilites were identified, including housework, education and discipline of children, health maintenance, recreation, birth control, financial management, home maintenance, employment outside the home, decision making, and maintaining relationships with relatives. Subjects were asked to indicate who should ideally be responsible for each

task: husband always, husband more than wife, husband and wife equally, wife more than husband, or wife always. Subjects were also asked to indicate who had been responsible for each task in their parents' marriage. The latter were interpreted in terms of "tradition" as remembered or perceived by each subject. Questionnaires were pretested on American subjects, revised, and translated into Japanese. The Japanese version was "back translated" (Brislin, 1980) into English and revised to maximize translation accuracy.

Questionnaires were distributed on a nonrandom basis to a sample of approximately 1000 Japanese subjects. Usable questionnaires were returned by 404 men and 467 women, for a total sample size of 871. The mean age of Japanese men was 34 years compared with 29 years for women. Men had an average of 15 years of education compared with 14 years for women. Seventy-four percent of men and 46 percent of women were currently married. Both men and women (who were parents) reported having an average of two children. Men reported an average household size of 3.27 people while women reported an average household size of 3.55 people. Eighty-nine percent of men were employed compared with 61 percent of the women.

Mean scores were calculated for each group on each item, and *t*-tests were used to test for differences between men and women.

Findings

The mean response to each observed family of origin responsibility item by each group and the results of *t*-tests comparing men and women are summarized in Table 1. Japanese men and women were found to differ significantly on four of eleven items.

Insert Table 1 about here.

Consistent with traditional norms for division of family labors, Japanese men and women tended to perceive or remember their families of origin as follows. Their mothers were primarily responsible for (Item 1) housework, cleaning and laundry, (Item 2) education of children, (Item 3) discipline of children, and (Item 4) maintenance of physical and mental health. Their fathers were primarily responsible for (Item 8) home maintenance, (Item 9) "breadwinning," and (Item 10) making the more important decisions.

In contrast to traditional norms for division of family labors, both groups tended to perceive or recall their parents sharing equally in (Item 5) planning for recreation and leisure, (Item 6) "family planning" or birth control, (Item 7) management of family finances, and (Item 11) maintenance of relationships with relatives.

The divisions of labor in the families of origin (or the

relevant perceptions and memories) of men and women differed significantly in four traditional role areas. Compared with Japanese women, men tended to perceive or remember their fathers being relatively more involved or responsible in traditional feminine labors such as (Item 4) maintenance of physical and mental health, (Item 7) family financial management, and (Item 11) maintenance of relationships with relatives. Compared with Japanese men, women tended to perceive or remember their mothers being relatively more involved or responsible in the traditional masculine labor of (Item 8) home maintenance. Given traditional Japanese segregation by sex, it's not surprising that males would perceive their fathers as more involved or responsible than would females; and that females would perceive their mothers as more involved or responsible than would males. Each sex would, presumably, have had more opportunity than the other sex, to observe the labors and contributions of their same sex parent.

Contemporary Ideals

The mean response to each division of labor (or "preferred responsibility") item by each group and the results of *t*-tests comparing men and women are summarized in Table 2. Japanese men and women were found to differ significantly on five of eleven items.

Insert Table 2 about here.

Both Japanese men and women preferred a division of labor in which wives take primary responsibility for (Item 1) housework, cleaning, and laundry. Similarly, both groups preferred a division of labor in which husbands take primary responsibility for (Item 8) home maintenance, (Item 9) "breadwinning", and (Item 10) making the more important decisions.

While Japanese women tended to think wives should be more responsible than husbands for (Item 4) maintenance of physical and mental health and (Item 7) management of family finances, Japanese men tended to prefer an equal sharing of these responsibilites.

Both Japanese men and women indicated a preference for equal sharing of responsibilities involving (Item 2) education of children, (Item 3) discipline of children, (Item 5) recreation and leisure planning, (Item 6) birth control, and (Item 11) maintaining relationships with relatives.

Japanese men and women were found to differ significantly in their preferences regarding division or sharing of five traditional family tasks. Japanese women wanted more equality or sharing of tasks related to (Item 1) housework, cleaning and laundry, (Item 2) education of children, (Item 9) "breadwinning", and (Item 10) important decision making. Japanese men wanted more equality or sharing of tasks related to (Item 4) maintenance of physical and mental health. These can be seen as issues warranting communication and negotiation in family relationships in contemporary Japan.

Social Change

Comparison of observed sharing/division of labor in family of origin (Table 1) with preferences for sharing/division of labor in present/future family life (Table 2) could have implications for social change. Respondents (both men and women) observed or recalled that in their families of origin, most (7 out of 11) labors had been divided and assigned primarily to wife or to husband, according to tradition. These same respondents, however, indicated a preference for sharing of responsibilities in their own marriage. Japanese women preferred that 5 of 11 responsibilities be shared equally; and Japanese men preferred that 7 of 11 responsibilities be shared equally by husband and wife. Such differences are consistent with interpretations of social change.

When the directions of differences are compared (each sex & item cell in Table 1 with the corresponding cell in Table 2), additional support for a social change interpretation is provided. In the majority (7/11) of cases (Items 1-4 & 9-11), the directions of differences for both men and women were consistent with an interpretation of changing ideals and norms towards increased sharing of family responsibilities.

However there were some interesting exceptions. The directions of differences on Item 8 suggest that while men might be more willing to share "home maintenance" responsibilites, women are less willing to participate.

The directions of differences on Item 7 suggest that both men and women prefer wives to be even more (and husbands less) responsible for financial management than in their families of origin. This would seem to suggest that at least one traditional ideal regarding division of labor is getting stronger.

Directions of differences on Items 5 (recreation/leisure) and 6 (birth control) may be interpreted and understood in terms of a growing desire for husbands to be more involved in family life than they were in the past.

Summary

In conclusion, Japanese men and women were found to prefer division of some family labors, reflecting traditional ideals. On the other hand, Japanese men and women were also found to prefer equality or sharing of some labors that were traditionally divided. The latter suggests that Japanese relationships and society may be undergoing change. Where Japanese men and women differed in ideals, differences may be seen as issues for communication and negotiation

Both Japanese men and women preferred a division of labor in which wives take primary responsibility for housework, cleaning, and laundry. Similarly, both groups preferred a division of labor in which husbands take primary responsibility for home maintenance, "breadwinning," and making the more important decisions.

While Japanese women tended to think wives should be more responsible than husbands for maintenance of physical and mental health and management of family finances, Japanese men tended to prefer an equal sharing of these responsibilites.

Both Japanese men and women indicated a preference for equal sharing of responsibilities involving education of children, discipline of children, recreation and leisure planning, birth control, and maintaining relationships with relatives.

Japanese men and women were found to differ significantly in their preferences regarding division or sharing of five traditional family tasks. Japanese women wanted more equality or sharing of tasks related to housework, cleaning and laundry, education of children, "breadwinning," and important decision making. Japanese men wanted more equality or sharing of tasks related to maintenance of physical and mental health. These can be seen as issues warranting communication and negotiation in family relationships in contemporary Japan.

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Table 1
Japanese Sex Differences in Division of Labors
Observed in Family of Origin.

Observed Responsibility:	Men (n = 404) Mean	Women (n = 467) Mean	t
1. ... for housework, cleaning, laundry.	1.22	1.17	1.07
2. ... for education of children.	2.24	2.27	-0.32
3. ... for discipline of children.	2.26	2.18	1.19
4. ... for maintenance of physical and mental health.	2.23	1.78	6.58***
5. ... for recreation and planning leisure activities.	3.27	3.21	0.70
6. ... for "family planning" (i.e. birth control).	3.03	3.03	-0.00
7. ... for financial management (i.e. budgeting, paying bills).	2.79	2.53	2.57*
8. ... for home maintenance (i.e. repairs, etc.).	4.12	3.79	3.90***
9. ... for "breadwinning" (i.e. employment outside the home).	4.41	4.29	1.95
10. ... for making the more important decisions.	4.37	4.27	1.52
11. ... for maintaining relationships with relatives.	3.11	2.73	4.96***

Note. Means were calculated for scores indicating the following: 1 = "wife always," 2 = "wife more than husband," 3 = "wife and husband equally," 4 = "husband more than wife," 5 = "husband always."
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Table 2
Japanese Sex Differences in Preferred Division of Labors in the Home.

Preferred Responsibility:	Men (n = 404) Mean	Women (n = 467) Mean	t
1. ... for housework, cleaning, laundry.	1.49	1.65	-3.25**
2. ... for education of children.	2.74	2.90	-3.45***
3. ... for discipline of children.	2.74	2.75	-0.33
4. ... for maintenance of physical and mental health.	2.70	2.25	7.64***
5. ... for recreation and planning leisure activities.	3.35	3.34	0.21
6. ... for "family planning" (i.e. birth control).	3.04	3.07	-0.73
7. ... for financial management (i.e. budgeting, paying bills).	2.52	2.43	1.19
8. ... for home maintenance (i.e. repairs, etc.)	3.88	3.93	-0.82
9. ... for "breadwinning" (i.e. employment outside the home).	4.39	4.11	5.47***
10. ... for making the more important decisions.	4.20	4.08	2.09*
11. ... for maintaining relationships with relatives.	2.97	2.95	0.42

Note. Means were calculated for scores indicating the following: 1 = "wife always," 2 = "wife more than husband," 3 = "wife and husband equally," 4 = "husband more than wife," 5 = "husband always."
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.